

Les Hoversten Funeral
II Corinthians 4:16-18

It was the summer of 1982.

The church here in Bode was losing their pastor,
and I had just finished my first year of seminary.

They needed an interim. I needed a job.

It was the perfect match.

I even had a place to stay, out on the farm with Les, Dorothy, and my fiancé, Jill.

It was early on that summer,

when one day Les brought home an old International H
that he'd purchased on a farm sale.

He planned to attach a belly mower and use it on the front yard,
but first he'd have to do some work.

Fourth gear was bad. The tranny needed a rebuild.

“Dave, if you've got time this evening, I could use your help.”

Truth be told, given these 10 fingers, all of which are still thumbs,
there was no way I'd be anything but *in the way*—

And I think Les knew that,

and I think it didn't matter—

So after supper, we went down to the shop and started turning bolts,

removed the seat,

lifted the deck plate,

exposed the gear box—

and we talked.

We talked about the weather,

about the field work,

about the job at hand.

We talked about growing up on the farm,

playing softball,

raising a family.

We talked about his brother Bob,

about Bob's strapping physique,

about Bob's keen shooting eye,

an eye so sharp he could light a match with a 22,
and about the day they lost Bob to the war.

There was a disarming ease to the entire conversation,
an ease that made small things important
and big things intimate—

And in it I found that time slowed,
that the spaces between the ticking of the clock widened
and each moment became sacred,
open doors
through which we passed small pieces of ourselves
and placed them into each others hands.

We turned bolts.

We tore down a gear box.

We talked...

Well, of course, one evening turned into another,
and another,
and another.

The days went by

and I soon found myself hurrying through the afternoon check list,

leaving church early,

racing home,

jumping into my work clothes,

and running out to the shop—

where the two of us picked up where we'd left off the night before—

pulling gears, changing bearings,

and talking about all those little things

that, woven together, create the cradle called friendship.

This was Les' way,

one thing woven into another,

simple tasks becoming occasions for much more important things.

Bean walking was really family time, talking time, planning vacation time.

Fishing on Little Sand was less about hooking a walleye,

and more about the people in the boat.

And rebuilding that old H???

It was just a reason to share a little bit of life with a future son-in-law.

With Les, things were always more than they appeared to be.

Saint Paul writes

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For the matters of the moment are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs everything else. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal...

I think that this is how Jesus comes to us,

one thing woven into another—

And in that weaving, its not the things that we can see that are most important,
but things unseen, things deeply embedded in life's rich patterns.

Woven, for instance, into Bob's death

and all those years of coming to terms with the senselessness of it all,

was the promise of resurrection

and the hope that someday,

Les would see his brother face to face.

Woven into marriage and babies,

children, and grand children, and great grand children

was the joy that fills one's heart,

when such rare gifts fall into our laps.

Woven into that day, when Dr. Lampe sat down,

extended his hand, and told us about the cancer

there was through the room, and especially in Les

an inexplicable peace,

a grace,

a dignity,

dare I say even a gratefulness for the life that he had been given.

And woven into his last breath,

was a door that passed from this world to the next,

where all that weighed his tired body down is no more.

So do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed. For the matters of this moment are achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs everything else. This is why we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. What is seen is temporary. What is unseen is eternal...

You all, of course, know

that someday your woven story will take you to that same door.

I cannot say how it will be for you.

For me?

Oh I know that there'll be many folks I'll want to see.

And at some point early on,

I suspect I'll slip into my work clothes and head on down to the shop,

where I'll find Les standing over a broken down red tractor,

and he'll shake my hand and introduce me to Bob—

and we'll turn bolts

and talk...

Postscript: After the interment, Bill Secor, one of our cousins told me that some years ago he'd bought Les' International H. The belly mower is still attached and the tractor still runs.